WILDSTORM UNIVERSE

#4
Nov

Suggested
For Mature
Readers

sleeper™

season two

ED BRUBAKER
SEAN PHILLIPS

Wildstorm.com

The night I finally meet up with Lynch starts out typically CLOAK-AND-DAGGER.

Someone leaves a note on my drink coaster.

DIVERSION AT 1:15 A.M. EXACTLY BE READY.

Alter Ego, one of the few New York hang-outs we still have, thanks to Tao's creative cloaking technology, is a CRIMINALS-ONLY establishment.

Which means that someone here is under Lynch's control.

It takes me all of ten seconds to figure out who it is. And I'm positive it's against his will.

I'LL BE RIGHT BACK. GOTTA TAKE A PISS.

STOP, YOU'RE MAKING ME *HOT.*

HA HA...

--TOLD YOU BASTARDS ABOUT THIS TEN TIMES THIS MONTH--

HA HA HA HA HA

Triple-X Ray isn't a brave man, but he IS a friend, so it would be HIM that Lynch would lean on.

RRRAALLFF!

RAY?

OH *GOD,* HOLDEN... JUST LEMME *EXPLAIN.* IT'S NOT--

IT'S OKAY, RAY. DON'T WORRY... I'M *NOT* GONNA HURT YOU.

I NEVER--NEVER *WANTED* TO. IT'S JUST, THAT BASTARD TALKS TO YOU AND HIS EYE GOES ALL *GREEN* AND--

AND YOU DO WHAT HE *WANTS* YOU TO.

YEAH... I MEAN, I *TRIED...*

BUT *YEAH.*

THAT'S WHAT LYNCH *DOES.* HE GETS INSIDE AND BENDS YOU OVER.

HE'S JUST LIKE *TAO,* IN A LOT OF WAYS.

SO--SO, YOU'RE *NOT* GONNA KILL ME?

IT WAS ME THAT TOLD 'IM HOW TO GET TO YOU WITH THAT JOB LAST MONTH, THAT HIJACKING THING.

NO, RAY, I'M NOT GOING TO KILL YOU... THIS'LL JUST BE OUR LITTLE SECRET, OKAY?

YOU JUST STEER CLEAR OF HIM FROM NOW ON AND DON'T TELL *ANYONE ELSE* ABOUT THIS.

SURE, HOLDEN, SURE...I MEAN, WHATEVER YOU *SAY,* Y'KNOW?

NOW I'VE GOT ANOTHER JOB FOR YOU. SOMETHING YOU'RE CONVENIENTLY PREPPED FOR ALREADY.

WHAT?

I WANT YOU TO HELP ME GET MISS MISERY *OUT OF HERE* BEFORE THIS PLACE GOES TO HELL IN HALF AN HOUR. SO, JUST ACT LIKE YOU'RE SICK, *REALLY* SICK.

HELL, I DON'T HAVETA *ACT*...BEEN PUKIN' *BLOOD* FOR *WEEKS* NOW. THINK THAT FUCKER GAVE ME AN *ULCER.*

TRUST ME, RAY, YOU GOT OFF EASY.

CAN I INTERRUPT YOU FOR A MINUTE?

WE'VE GOT A LITTLE *PROBLEM.*

WHAT THE *FUCK,* HOLDEN? I'M GOING TO MISS THE DONKEY SHOW.

AS IF YOU WEREN'T BORED WITH THOSE TWO YEARS AGO.

LOOK, RAY JUST PUKED ALL OVER HIMSELF AND SOMEONE'S GOTTA GET HIM BACK TO BASE *SAFELY.*

AND I'M SUDDENLY AN *ESCORT?* FUCK OFF AND DIE.

GRETCHEN, *C'MON.* I'D DO IT MYSELF BUT ME AND THE *HOUNDS'VE* GOTTA MEET PETER GRIMM IN A FEW MINUTES...

...AND YOU AND I *BOTH* KNOW RAY'S IMPORTANT FOR TOMORROW'S JOB.

YOU'RE *LYING* TO ME.

THAT'S ALWAYS A *POSSIBILITY.*

ALL RIGHT, BUT I SWEAR TO FUCK I'M GOING TO KICK HIM DOWN THE STAIRS WHEN WE GET THERE.

NO, YOU'RE ***NOT.*** RAY'S OUR FRIEND.

GOD DAMN IF YOU'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE ***ME*** SICK NOW, TOO, YOU BASTARD.

I ***BETTER*** SEE YOU LATER, BECAUSE YOU OWE ME. BIG TIME. AND YOU BETTER NOT DO ANYTHING ***STUPID.***

OR AT LEAST NOT MORE THAN ***USUAL.***

NO PROMISES.

ALL RIGHT, RAY, YOU BUZZ-KILLING SON OF A BITCH, LET'S WALK YOU HOME.

I'M ***SORRY,*** M...I SWEAR.

ALREADY WITH THE ***WHINING.***

Face/Two Face

At 1:13 a.m., Peter Grimm, one of my least favorite people in the world, finally walks in.

Grimm is Tao's ranking Prodigal, his second-in-command, and he's always hated my guts--even before he knew I was working for the other side all those years.

My team--The Hounds--and I are supposed to work a job for him tomorrow, and I thought it'd be funny to make him meet us here.

WHAT, THEY DON'T HAVE A ***PRIVATE*** ROOM ANYWHERE IN THIS STINK-HOUSE, CARVER?

THEY DO, BUT I THINK IT'S RESERVED FOR LIVE-WEBCAM ANAL ***FISTING*** OR SOME-THING.

He's such a stuck-up prick that he never socializes with the rabble.

FUCKING CHRIST...

It's just a lucky break that Grimm turns out to be right in the way of Lynch's diversion...

...CAN'T YOU PEOPLE PULL YOUR-SELVES OUT OF THE ***GUTTER*** FOR FIVE SEC--

KA-WHOOM

FEDERAL AGENTS!

NOBODY MOVE!

I hope to hell Lynch doesn't like these guys.

OR WE WILL OPEN FIRE!

Because there's no way anyone here is giving themselves up without a fight.

Though most of them WILL head for the exits once they see THAT guy.

But not Peter Grimm. He LIVES to kill super-heroes.

YOU JUST PICKED THE *WRONG* TITTY-BAR, *METAL DICK.*

I'm almost tempted to stay and watch, in hopes he'll take as good as he usually gives...

And to make sure my guys get out okay...

...but I have to remember what this raid is about in the first place.

Giving me a chance to duck out unnoticed.

So I'll just have to trust that Pit Bull and Blackwolf are smart enough to know when to turn tail on their own.

And I'll try to help clear their way a bit, just in case.

IDIOTS.

AAAAHHH!

Lynch must be getting into my head again already...because I'm leaving people alive.

What the hell is going to become of me?

Twenty minutes later I'm halfway across town, looking for a car with the right license plate.

One of Lynch's little jokes. Ha fucking ha.

SLEEPER 1

Of course, the car is another joke altogether. I'm expecting to find a message inside the glove box...

...but apparently THIS is my final destination, in a way.

REMOTE HOMING SEQUENCE ENGAGED...

OH, SHIT.

I HATE flying cars. I really do. They're so SUPER-SPY.

But at least I don't have to worry about STEERING this one, and I don't get motion-sick anymore.

Next thing I know I'm coasting down onto a rooftop somewhere in New Jersey...

...And Lynch, a man I never thought I'd see walking and talking again... He's smiling at me.

...As if we're just two old friends.

As if he didn't hang me out to dry.

YOU KEEP THE FUCK ***AWAY,*** OLD MAN.

I STILL HAVEN'T DECIDED IF I'M JUST GONNA ***KILL YOU*** OR NOT.

WHILE ***YOU*** MAY BELIEVE THAT, AGENT CARVER, I DON'T.

I KNOW YOU DON'T LIKE ME VERY MUCH RIGHT NOW, BUT WE ***BOTH*** KNOW I HAVE SOMETHING YOU WANT.

MAYBE I DON'T WANT IT ANYMORE.

THEN I SUPPOSE YOU CAN SHOOT ME.

BUT I WENT TO ***CONSIDERABLE*** TROUBLE GETTING THIS FACILITY ***EMPTIED*** TONIGHT, SO WHY NOT ***AT LEAST*** HEAR ME OUT?

YOU CAN ALWAYS KILL ME ***LATER,*** RIGHT?

--IS THIS PLACE?

AN I.O. SCIENCE LAB AND *TEMPORARY* HOLDING-FACILITY.

OH *YEAH*, AND WHAT EXACTLY ARE YOU *HOLDING* HERE? NOT *ME*, I HOPE.

NO, THERE WOULDN'T BE MUCH OF A POINT TO *THAT*, WOULD THERE?

YOU'RE EXACTLY WHERE I *NEED YOU* TO BE ALREADY.

NO, AS OF EARLY YESTERDAY MORNING, THIS FACILITY IS THE HOME TO SOMEONE--OR RATHER *SOMETHING*--THAT'S OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO *YOU*.

MAYBE YOU COULD BE *LESS* LIKE YOUR USUAL ASSHOLE SELF AND JUST PUT YOUR CARDS ON THE TABLE, BECAUSE I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION YOU WERE OFFERING ME--

OH, I'M OFFERING *EXACTLY* WHAT WE DISCUSSED, HOLDEN.

BUT IT'S A BIT MORE *COMPLICATED* THAN THAT.

IT ALWAYS *IS* WITH YOU, OLD MAN.

SO TELL IT...

THE THING IS--THAT DAY THAT CHANGED YOUR LIFE... THE DAY THAT *ARTIFACT* FELL OUT OF THE *BLEED*.

THAT WASN'T THE *ONLY THING* THAT FELL THAT DAY.

YOUR TEAM WAS SENT TO RETRIEVE THE ARTIFACT BECAUSE OUR SAT-COM IMAGERY HAD SHOWN US HOW DEVASTATINGLY POWERFUL IT WAS.

IT HAD WIPED OUT AN ENTIRE VILLAGE EVEN THOUGH ITS IMPACT BARELY REGISTERED. WE COULDN'T LET THAT FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS.

IT WAS ONLY AFTER YOU LEFT THAT WE DISCOVERED THE SHIP THE ARTIFACT WAS FROM HAD CRASHED IN A RIVER A THOUSAND MILES NORTH OF YOUR DESTINATION.

SOMETHING MUST'VE KNOCKED IT OUT OF THE BLEED, AND IT WAS FALLING APART AS IT ENTERED OUR REALITY.

WE ENDED UP FINDING PIECES OF IT ALL OVER SOUTH AMERICA.

DID YOU?

OF COURSE, MOST OF IT WAS USELESS.

THE ONLY ITEMS OF ANY REAL VALUE WERE THAT ARTIFACT THAT MELDED TO YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM...

...AND OUR FRIEND HERE, WHO'S IN THE *HOLDING CELL* IN THE BASEMENT.

JESUS...YOU'VE GOTTA BE FUCKING *KIDDING* ME?

NOT AT ALL.

HE'S SOME KIND OF ALIEN EXPLORER, FROM WHAT WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO GATHER.

HIS PEOPLE ***MADE*** THE ARTIFACT. WE BELIEVE IT'S A KIND OF ***SYMBIOTIC ARMOR*** FOR DIMENSIONAL TRAVEL.

THE POINT BEING, WE ALSO BELIEVE HE CAN ***REMOVE*** THIS ARMOR FROM YOU.

HE CAN ***CURE*** YOU.

YOU SON OF A BITCH. YOU'VE HAD HIM THE WHOLE FUCKING ***TIME***, HAVEN'T YOU?

NO. HE WAS IN ***HIDING*** FOR NEARLY A YEAR.

HIS SPECIES IS ***ADEPT*** AT BLENDING INTO SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENTS.

I HAD TO CALL IN ***SEVERAL*** FAVORS FROM THE CAPE AND MASK CONTINGENT TO FINALLY GET HIM IN CUSTODY.

BY THE TIME I KNEW WHAT HE COULD DO, YOU WERE ALREADY IN PLACE IN TAO'S ORGANIZATION. I HAD TO MAKE A JUDGMENT CALL.

IT WAS AN ***IMPORTANT*** MISSION.

BUT NOW THAT YOU ***NEED ME*** AGAIN YOU DANGLE THE SECRET ALIEN CURE TO WHAT AILS ME.

AND YOU DECIDED TO LEAVE ME OUT THERE AND KEEP ME IN THE DARK.

HOLDEN, I ***NEVER*** PLANNED ON LEAVING YOU ON YOUR OWN. I EVEN HAD A BACK-UP PLAN IN PLACE IN CASE OF MY DEMISE.

THE FACT THAT TAO GOT TO BOTH ME ***AND*** THE MAN I SENT TO SAVE YOU ONLY ***PROVES*** HOW IMPORTANT THE JOB I SENT YOU ON REALLY IS.

UH HUNH.

SO THIS THING, THIS ***ALIEN***, HE CAN REALLY FIX ME?

HE ***BELIEVES*** HE CAN, YES. HE'S NOT AS FAMILIAR WITH HUMAN ANATOMY, BUT THE PROCEDURE ***SHOULD*** BE POSSIBLE.

I WANT TO TALK TO HIM.

OF COURSE.

DOES HE SPEAK ENGLISH?

NOT ***EXACTLY.*** YOU WON'T HAVE ANY TROUBLE COMMUNICATING WITH HIM, THOUGH.

FINE. LET'S GO.

The thing looks at me with too much recognition, and then it communicates.

Like Lynch said, I have no trouble understanding it.

Its thoughts vibrate up my spine, and I can actually feel them, moving into my brain, becoming colors, sounds, pictures...and ultimately WORDS.

YOU/HE ARE THE ONE THE LYNCH MAN HAS THOUGHT/TALKED OF. I CAN SEE/FEEL THE...RAIMENT... IN/ON YOU/HE.

YES...*WAIT.* SLOW DOWN... *PLEASE.*

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT, BUT YOU'RE MAKING MY HEAD *HURT.*

THE RAIMENT MOVES/DANCES TO THINK/TALK WITH US. THE MOVE/DANCE HURTS YOU/HE.

THE RAIMENT WANTS/NEEDS TO COME OUT/HOME.

SO...YOU CAN GET IT *OUT OF ME,* THEN?

LYNCH WAS TELLING THE *TRUTH?*

THE RAIMENT MUST/NEEDS TO LEAVE YOU/HE. YES. IT IS/MUST BE POSSIBLE/ABLE TO REMOVE FROM YOU/HE.

YOU CAN DO IT? YOURSELF? PERSONALLY?

YES.

AND I'LL BE LIKE I WAS BEFORE?

I/WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND/GROK YOUR QUESTION/ STATEMENT. BEFORE IS NOW. NOW IS BEFORE.

I/WE CAN REMOVE THE RAIMENT.

YOU **DO THAT,** AND I SWEAR TO GOD I **WILL** GET YOU OUT OF HERE.

I/WE BELIEVE YOU/ HE BUT I/WE ARE FINE/HEALTHY. THE LYNCH MAN IS GOOD/KIND TO I/WE.

YEAH, WELL...

THAT'S JUST BECAUSE HE ***WANTS SOMETHING*** FROM YOU.

--KNOW YOU'VE TURNED MORE CYNICAL THAN ***USUAL*** SINCE MY DOWN TIME, BUT I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND THAT I REALLY ***AM*** ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS, HOLDEN.

I'M FIGHTING TO MAINTAIN SOME SEMBLANCE OF ***ORDER*** IN THIS WORLD. SOME SENSE OF ***JUSTICE.*** YOU USED TO BE ***PART*** OF THAT FIGHT.

I WAS...BUT AFTER A WHILE, YOU HAVE TO WONDER IF THE ENDS ***REALLY DO*** JUSTIFY THE MEANS, LYNCH.

I MEAN, IT'S NOT AS IF THIS WORLD YOU'VE HELPED SHAPE IS ANYTHING TO BE ***PROUD OF.***

WELL...REGARDLESS OF YOUR ***FEELINGS,*** WE NEED ONE ANOTHER, AGENT CARVER.

YOU CAN HELP ME BRING DOWN TAO, AND I CAN CURE YOU.

THAT'S NOT ***GOOD ENOUGH.*** IF YOU WANT ME, I'VE GOT SOME ***OTHER*** DEMANDS, TOO.

I'M LISTENING.

FIRST OFF, YOU STAY THE FUCK AWAY FROM TRIPLE-X RAY. ***AND*** I WANT HIM ***PARDONED*** ONCE WE GET TAO.

AND I WANT A NEW ***LIFE,*** ON SOME ***TROPICAL ISLAND*** SOMEWHERE, AWAY FROM ALL THIS BULLSHIT...WITH ENOUGH MONEY TO NOT WORRY ABOUT MONEY EVER AGAIN.

DONE. ALL OF IT.

RIGHT. AND THERE'S JUST ***ONE MORE*** THING...

YOU NEARLY RUINED THE WHOLE DEAL, ALDO.

I/WE DID AS THE LYNCH MAN ASK/DEMANDED.

YOUR FRIEND/PARTNER THINKS/FEELS WHAT YOU/HE WANT/NEED.

YES, BUT DON'T THINK I CAN'T READ YOU AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, ALDO. THAT LITTLE PAUSE BEFORE ANSWERING HIS QUESTION.

DON'T GO GROWING A CONSCIENCE ON ME AT THIS POINT.

NOT IF YOU EVER WANT TO SEE THE INSIDE OF YOUR PRECIOUS ***SHIP-HOME*** EVER AGAIN.

NO...I/WE DID AS THE LYNCH MAN ASK/DEMANDED.

YOU/HE MUST GIVE I/WE OUR FREEDOM/ RELEASE.

WE'LL JUST SEE ABOUT THAT... WON'T WE?

...HOLDEN, 'ZAT YOU?

YEAH, SORRY TO WAKE YOU.

DON'T BE. JUST GET IN HERE.

SO, CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT THAT BULLSHIT WAS ***ABOUT*** TONIGHT?

NOT YET.

BUT IT'S OKAY... TAO KNOWS MOST OF WHAT I'M DOING.

MOST OF?

HEY, I ***WORK*** FOR HIM, BUT I'M NOT HIS ***BITCH.***

NO, YOU'RE NOT. YOU'RE ***MINE.***

--AND SO YOU AGREED TO HELP HIM?

THAT'S WHAT YOU ***WANTED,*** ISN'T IT, TAO?

OH, OF COURSE IT IS.

I'M JUST SURPRISED YOUR DEMAND OF A PRIVATE ISLAND AND A NEW IDENTITY WERE SUFFICIENT TO CONVINCE HIM WE AREN'T PULLING A ***TRIPLE-CROSS.***

THERE'S NO TELLING WHETHER HE WAS CONVINCED OR NOT. IT'S ***LYNCH,*** REMEMBER?

I'M SURE HE'LL COVER HIS ASS ***SIX WAYS FROM SUNDAY*** WHETHER HE BELIEVES ME OR NOT.

TRUE.

I GUESS WE'LL JUST HAVE TO WORK AROUND THAT, THEN.

OH, BY THE WAY, DID YOU KNOW THAT PETER GRIMM WAS ***SERIOUSLY INJURED*** LAST NIGHT?

IT DOESN'T SURPRISE ME. GUY HE TOOK ON WAS LIKE A ***WALKING TANK.***

HOW BAD WAS IT?

HE'LL BE OUT FOR OVER TWO WEEKS.

DOESN'T *THAT* JUST BREAK MY HEART.

I KNOW *YOU* DON'T LIKE PETER, BUT HE'S VERY USEFUL TO ME, JUST AS MUCH AS *YOU ARE*, HOLDEN.

REMEMBER THAT.

AND *TRY* TO GIVE SOME WARNING THE NEXT TIME LYNCH STAGES A VIOLENT *DIVERSION* ON YOUR ACCOUNT.

HEY, I ONLY FOUND OUT RIGHT BEFORE IT HAPPENED. WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO DO, *TELL* PETER?

YOU *TOLD ME* TO KEEP THIS ALL BETWEEN THE TWO OF US.

AND YET YOU *STILL* FOUND A WAY TO GET MISS MISERY AND TRIPLE-X RAY OUT BEFORE THE ACTION.

WELL, YEAH...I *LIKE* THEM.

WELL, IN ANY CASE, THE PIECES HAVE BEEN SET INTO MOTION. SOON YOU AND I WILL START TAKING JOHN LYNCH'S WORLD APART, WHETHER HE SEES US COMING OR NOT.

THAT *WOULD* BE FINE... EXCEPT I'M NOT DOING *ONE MORE THING* TO GET ANY DEEPER INTO THIS MESS...

...UNTIL YOU TELL ME EXACTLY WHY YOU AND LYNCH HAVE SUCH A *HARD-ON* FOR EACH OTHER.

Brubaker*Phillips*Strachan*Fletcher*Quinn*Dunbier